

Budget Council Meeting – 4 March 2020

Answers to questions submitted by members of the public prior to the start of the meeting, but which were not able to be asked within the time limit applied at the meeting.

Question from Nasar Raof

To Councillor Julie Dore, Leader of the City Council

Q Subject: New Delhi Protect: RSS Government Terrorising Muslim Population

500 people locked up in New Delhi for protesting and exercising democracy? Over 500 dead and going up? What will the Council do to inject some of the views of muslims and the community of Sheffield alongside groups such as Sisters of Kashmir in raising this with the Foreign Office?

Will Councillors join the protest on Sunday 15th outside the Town Hall stand with us that has been organised by Councillor Zahira Naz?

A. Councillor Zahira Naz will attend the protest, organised by the Sisters4Kashmir, to represent the members of Labour Group.

Questions from Russell Johnson

To Councillor Julie Dore, Leader of the City Council

Q1 Subject: Accountability, Transparency and Openness

Is the Leader aware of the press and public criticism of the peremptory and completely unnecessary removal of the public from the last Cabinet meeting?

Does the Leader understand that this and the restriction of Public Questions in this Full Council further damages the Council's reputation as an organisation that is scared of genuine public scrutiny and accountability?

A1 This Council is one of the few councils who incorporate public questions into the council procedures, at all public council meetings. We believe it to be extremely important that the public are given every opportunity to engage with their elected representatives. However, the Council Procedure Rules provide the Chair of a meeting with the discretion to clear the public gallery if there is a general disturbance.

These two questions were asked at the February Cabinet meeting and submitted again for written answers. They were not answered.

Q2 Subject: Corporate Hospitality

A “Rotten Boroughs” feature in a London magazine recently highlighted the Leader’s eleven acceptances of SWFC hospitality. In the same period, only two similar visits to SUFC are declared.

What business interests are being promoted, when will we see the fruits of the endeavour and why the apparent partiality?

A2 The declarations made by myself are available on the Council’s website.

Q3 Subject: Reflecting on the Legacy of the Dore Leadership

As the current nine-year regime draws to a close, please would Councillor Dore honestly reflect on what gestures might be possible to at least in part enhance the view that history may take of the years of perfidious, secretive, mendacious, tribal, ineffective and profligate governance whilst she has been in control?

Some suggestions Councillor Dore might consider are: a sincere apology to her subjects; a commitment to an independent inquiry on the Streets Ahead fiasco; and a commitment to a truly inclusive modern committee system in the near future, whatever the Referendum outcome.

Or perhaps the Leader is entirely content to be judged on the progress and reputation of the City over her period in office?

A3 The Council’s achievements are well documented.

Questions from Mark Smith

To Councillor Julie Dore, Leader of the City Council

Subject: Transparency

Dear Chair and Council, thank you for your time today. I have some questions regarding transparency. For clarity and ease of understanding, please could you answer the first two questions with either a yes or a no.

Q1 Is the Council aware that it is an offence for a person to alter, deface, block, erase, destroy or conceal any record held by the public authority, with the intention of preventing disclosure by that authority? Yes or no.

A1 Yes.

Q2 If a member or employee of the Council were to be aware of such behaviour, are they required to report it? Yes or No

A2 Yes.

For the third and fourth questions, please could you provide a fuller answer. On 17th February the Leader of the Council was forwarded an email entitled "FWD: Covered by Legal Privilege and not subject to FOI OP Quito". The original email didn't contain any legally privileged information, in fact it was sent out to external parties.

Q3 How aware is the Leader of the Council of Council Officers declaring communications "not subject to FOI"?

A3 See answer below.

Q4 When the Leader was forwarded this email, did she take further action and, if so, what action did she take?

A4 I have been advised by Legal Services that when the legal team were instructed to consider injunction proceedings, it was recognised that there would be a significant volume of email traffic generated and, in due course, a number of EIR/FOIA requests made. In that context at the point the requests were made, identifying which emails might be subject to privilege would be a mammoth task. The purpose of the header was to facilitate filtering potentially applicable emails to enable identification.

The Council are and always have been aware that the 'Public Interest Test' must be applied to disclosure requests so there would always need to be that extra layer of checking that LPP was being properly applied in subsequent EIR/FOIA replies. Replies to EIR/FOIA requests are managed by the Information Knowledge and Management Team, which is independent of all the departments providing information, and this provides a further layer of assurance that EIR/FOIA requests are being properly replied to.

Question from Chris Cutforth

To Councillor Terry Fox, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, and Governance

Q1 Subject: Referendum

Does the local Labour Party have a clear political position with regard to the outcome of the upcoming local referendum?

A1 We will let the people decide.

Question from Nasar Raouf

To Councillor Bob Johnson, Cabinet Member for Transport and Development

Q1. Subject: Taxi CAZ Impact on Rotherham Driver

Impact on residents of Rotherham and drivers who live in Sheffield. Financial burdening them. Have Council acknowledged that by delaying and keeping people in limbo is not doing anything with regards to pollution? People like myself who live in Sheffield will also have to pay whilst in our role as helping charities and other voluntary work in the town centre? Will drivers like myself and the ones I represent get the assistance financially? What is taking so long? Are the Council aware many impacts such as that on mental health of drivers in South Yorkshire and Humberside? We need a fair deal?

A1. Thank you for submitting a question to Full Council on 4th March. Given the time pressures during the meeting it was not possible to provide you with an answer on the day and I am now writing to provide you with a response.

The impact of poor air quality in Sheffield is having a significant impact on the health and life expectancy of people that live and work across the city. Exposure to pollution from the busiest roads in the city carries the same risk as passively smoking 10 cigarettes a day. Poor air quality is having a disproportionate effect on the young and old in our communities. We do not consider this an acceptable position and, in line with our legal direction from Government, we are continuing to develop our Clean Air Zone proposals to achieve improvements in air quality.

Unfortunately we have been waiting for feedback from Government on our proposed CAZ proposals for a significant period of time and we do appreciate that this is frustrating for everyone.

The next stage in developing our proposals will be the preparation of a Full Business Case (FBC) which will set out the full details of our proposed scheme. This will include the packages of financial support that we will be proposing for owners of non-compliant vehicles to assist them in upgrading to cleaner vehicles; thereby avoiding the impact of charges and improving air quality. We will continue to seek financial support from the Government to deliver our proposed scheme. This will include financial support for taxi drivers who are licensed in Sheffield and will be most affected by the proposed charging Clean Air Zone. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC), who are working jointly with us on the Clean Air Zone proposals, will also be proposing support packages to improve certain vehicles in Rotherham. The FBC will be presented to a future Cabinet meeting for approval before being submitted to Government.

Taxi drivers had the opportunity to comment on the proposals and a large number did. That feedback will inform the final recommendations. You may

be interested in looking at the consultation results which have recently been provided on the Council's website.

Questions from Matt Smith

To Councillor Mary Lea, Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks and Leisure

Q1 Subject: Library Fines

Trafford and Bolton Councils, as well as many others including neighbouring Leeds and Barnsley Councils, have abolished library fines resulting in lower levels of lost and stolen items and increased library usage. Could the Council please follow suit and abolish library fines?

A1 We have been looking into the implications of taking away library fines for the late return of library materials. We already do not charge fines for children and people with disabilities, though there is no data to evidence either way that this results in lower levels of lost and stolen items.

This is constantly under review and will be looked at again.

Q2 Subject: Library Service

Is the Cabinet Member for Libraries aware that the Council in Leeds has managed to keep over thirty libraries open and staffed despite suffering bigger austerity cuts than Sheffield. Could we please have a cross-party working group to visit Leeds libraries to study ways the Leeds model of running libraries may be implemented in Sheffield?

A2 Each Local Authority makes decisions based on local circumstances and the needs of their local communities. The model adopted in Sheffield came from an extensive review of the service in 2014 and resulted in all libraries remaining open, when they could have faced closure. The model has proved to be successful. It is unlikely that we would seek to return to a situation where all of Sheffield Libraries were brought back within Council control.

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